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Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
Sixty-eighth session

Summary record of the 1542nd meeting*
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 31 October 2017, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Leinarte

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* No summary record was prepared for the rest of the meeting.

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention (*continued*)

Sixth periodic report of Israel (CEDAW/C/ISR/6; CEDAW/C/ISR/QPR/6)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Israel took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Ms. Raz Shechter** (Israel) said that the advancement and promotion of gender equality and women's rights had been on the agenda of every Government since the foundation of the State of Israel. Equality was a fundamental principle enshrined in its declaration of independence and the 1951 Equal Rights for Women Law. Between 2010 and 2014, some 50 laws and amendments had bolstered gender equality and women's empowerment. Israel had been the first State Member of the United Nations to officially recognize in its legislation the importance of the women's participation at all decision-making levels of national institutions and mechanisms. It was committed to achieving equality and leaving no one behind in its efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

3. During her visit in September 2016 the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, had commended the work towards accession to the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention). Following the adoption of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), the Government had enacted legislation that required women to be included in public bodies established by the Government on issues of national importance, including peace negotiations. The Israeli international development agency had been actively training women from around the world in leadership skills. In September 2014, an interministerial committee on domestic violence had been set up and its findings and recommendations published in July 2016. Another important achievement had been the adoption of resolution 61/1 of the Commission on the Status of Women on preventing and eliminating sexual harassment in the workplace (E/2017/27-E/CN.6/2017/21), which her country had sponsored.

4. Civil society's contributions had been given full consideration during the drafting of the sixth periodic report. Since 2012, the Ministries of Justice and Foreign Affairs had been participating in a joint project aimed at improving cooperation between State authorities and civil society organizations on reporting to the treaty bodies. In 2017, the two Ministries had initiated a round-table project in different academic institutes nationwide that had provided a unique platform for discussion between civil society, academics and government representatives on such topics as the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons, Israelis of Ethiopian decent, the Bedouin population, women and persons with disabilities.

5. While her country faced many security challenges, it remained committed to peace. It had reached peace accords with Egypt and Jordan and continued to strive to reach a historical compromise with the Palestinians that would fulfil its long-standing desire to see two States living side by side in peace and security. In order to achieve that goal, Israelis and Palestinians needed to work together; there was no doubt that Israeli and Palestinian women had much to contribute to that process.

6. **Ms. Palmor** (Israel) said that her first name was composed of the initials of her paternal grandmother, who had died young, shortly after the Second World War, and her maternal grandmother, who had had been sent to die immediately on her arrival at the Auschwitz concentration camp given that, as an elderly woman, her life had been considered worthless.

7. As part of her country's increasing efforts to combat trafficking in persons, an interministerial committee had been set up to examine the possibility of criminalizing the use of prostitution. While the law in Israel criminalized acts such as procurement or maintaining a brothel, with the exception of the use of child prostitution, it did not criminalize the use of prostitution services. The interministerial committee had heard

personal testimonies and expert opinions and studied models adopted in other countries with the aim of strengthening protection for women from exploitation and trafficking. Its concluding report was currently being finalized. As a result of its work, in July 2017, two private members' bills criminalizing the use of prostitution services had been approved in preliminary readings in the Knesset.

8. Another interministerial committee had been established to formulate a strategic plan to address the negative repercussions of polygamy, which was still common among the Bedouin population. The committee, which included representatives of civil society and the Bedouin population, was examining ways to increase public awareness of the harm caused by polygamy and to increase law enforcement in that regard. It was also focusing on how welfare services could cater for the emotional and social needs of women and children who had been harmed by polygamous marriage. Furthermore, the Attorney General had recently published a guideline stressing that the Supreme Court rejected any arguments in defence of the act of polygamy on cultural grounds. In 2016, a branch of the Legal Aid Administration had been opened in Rahat, the largest Bedouin city in the Negev, making the courts more accessible to Bedouin residents there.

9. Convictions in cases of sexual harassment had more than doubled over the previous two years. The Knesset had amended the Legal Aid Law in order to grant free legal aid to victims of grave sexual offences, with no financial eligibility test, with a view to helping victims of sexual crimes to overcome difficulties often experienced during criminal proceedings, including difficulties in making victim impact statements for the sentencing of accused persons or parole or pardon hearings. In August 2017, the District Court of Tel Aviv had ordered the closure of a strip club on the grounds that it had violated local planning laws. The Court had ruled that activities that violated women's human dignity, including the objectification of women in general, were incompatible with the laws, demonstrating the innovative use of tools other than criminal law in the protection of women.

10. Legislative steps that had been taken to further gender equality in the labour market included the extension of paid maternity leave to 15 weeks. Additional flexibility had been added to fathers' entitlement to paternity leave, including an amendment enabling fathers whose wives were self-employed to take parental leave in lieu of their partners. Women currently constituted 62 per cent of civil service employees in her country. In 2017, the Civil Service Commission had issued the Gender Equality Index report, which examined several gender equality indicators in every ministry. Each ministry had received a copy of the report and comprehensive information on its gender pay gaps. In addition, the Commissioner had issued a guideline that included transparent criteria for salary levels with a view to precluding wage discrimination.

11. A similar report was published annually by the Ministry of Justice, containing comprehensive information on employment. According to the 2016 report, 68 per cent of employees were women, and they also held 66 per cent of high-ranking positions. There were virtually no wage differences between men and women in the Ministry of Justice. Furthermore, 51 per cent of judges were currently women. In 2017, two women of Ethiopian descent had been appointed as judges for the first time in the Israeli judicial system. In April 2017, a woman had been appointed for the first time to serve as a judge in a Muslim religious court. In August 2017, the High Court of Justice had reached a landmark decision, ruling that the criteria used to appoint the Director of the Rabbinical Courts must be relevant and applicable to both women and men. A woman had recently been appointed to serve as Deputy Director of the Rabbinical Courts.

12. In 2017, the law had been amended to add to the administrative sanctions that rabbinical courts could impose on husbands who had been imprisoned for refusing to grant the Jewish writ of divorce. The State Attorney had also issued a guideline in 2016 clarifying the fact that criminal procedures could be initiated against a spouse who refused to grant a divorce in certain circumstances, on the grounds that they were violating a judicial order.

13. In 2017, regulations governing the processing of asylum requests were amended to make them more gender-sensitive, including with respect to victims of gender-based violence, including sexual violence.

Articles 1 to 6

14. **Ms. Ameline** asked whether the State party would consider lifting its reservations to articles 7 and 16 of the Convention. At the least, she hoped that, in future, civil and religious courts would adopt a more consistent approach in their rulings on matters relating to women's rights in marriage and divorce. She wished to know whether the State party would consider ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention.

15. The lack of a comprehensive definition in the State party's legislation of the term "discrimination against women" that was in accordance with the definition in article 1 of the Convention meant that there was not a sufficiently robust basis for the explicit condemnation of such discrimination. She asked how the Knesset planned to address that. The Committee would welcome an update on the efforts being made to raise awareness in the State party of the Convention and to disseminate the Committee's concluding observations.

16. While the Committee was aware of the State party's position on its extraterritorial obligations in the occupied Palestinian territories, she wished to know whether it would consider extending the scope of its peace and security strategy to the territories. She asked whether it planned to evaluate the impact of the measures Israel had taken in the occupied territories in term of settlements, the destruction of infrastructure, the disproportionate use of force and the lack of access to humanitarian assistance.

17. It would be useful to hear the delegation's comments on reports that some human rights defenders and non-governmental organizations were prevented from taking action and deprived of their freedom of expression.

18. She asked how the State party planned to further harmonize positive law with religious law in order to ensure a more modern society. In the light of the fact that very few Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers had been granted the right to asylum in the State party, she would welcome more details about how refugee and asylum-seeker status were granted. Given the inequalities faced by several minorities, notably the Bedouin population, both in law and in practice, she would appreciate additional information on how women's rights were streamlined into the strategies to improve the situation of all minorities in the State party.

19. **Ms. Raz Shechter** (Israel) said that the State party's position on the inapplicability of the Convention to the occupied territories had not changed.

20. **Ms. Cohen-Bakshi** (Israel) said that, in light of the recent changes to the law, including the raising of the minimum legal age for marriage, her Government was prepared to embark on discussions on a review of the State party's reservation to article 16.

21. Personal status and family matters were regulated by two judicial systems, the family courts and the religious courts, but filing a suit in one court prevented the other from addressing the issue, which, in divorce cases in particular, led to a race to establish the most favourable jurisdiction. Many attempts had been made to do away with the "race for jurisdiction", without success. While the recently enacted Family Dispute Settlement Law could not solve the problem, it could reduce its impact, in part by preventing the escalation of family disputes and allowing for an agreed settlement.

22. **Ms. Dror-Shpoliansky** (Israel) said that Israeli civil society engaged in constructive dialogue with government authorities, actively initiated legislation and helped to promote and raise awareness about human rights. There were no legal restrictions on organizations' action to promote human rights. They enjoyed the right to freedom of association and of assembly in accordance with the law. The freedom of assembly must be balanced with the need to maintain public order and safety. The police were responsible for granting licences for demonstrations and could impose restrictions. However, the police also had a duty to protect demonstrations and demonstrators from harassment.

23. The State Attorney had issued guidelines on sentencing in cases of violence against journalists during demonstrations. Given journalists' importance to democratic society and the need to protect their ability to report freely and without fear, in certain circumstances, the prosecution could request a more severe punishment in such cases. In addition, a recent High Court of Justice ruling had emphasized that, although the law authorized the police to require a permit where the demonstration was of a political nature, its authority to do so must be interpreted narrowly.

24. International treaties were incorporated into Israeli domestic law by means of specific legislation of various types or by a court ruling. Customary international law applied provided it did not contradict the national law. Human rights treaties also constituted an important tool for the interpretation of national legislation.

25. **Ms. Kremer** (Israel) said that Israel currently hosted some 4,000 persons from Darfur, of whom 2,900 had applied for asylum. In 2017, the Government had decided that the situation in Darfur warranted an interim solution and had issued some 200 temporary residence visas on humanitarian grounds to those who met the relevant criteria. Asylum applications were considered by a committee that included representatives of the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Any individual granted refugee status received a renewable temporary residence permit. The Government reserved the right to review the situation in the refugee's country of origin and might determine that a refugee no longer faced danger if that situation changed.

26. **Ms. Tene-Gilad** (Israel) said that the question of ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention was routinely considered by the relevant government departments and a decision would be taken when the issue became more relevant. The State party's report was published on the websites of various government departments in English, Arabic and Hebrew and was circulated to the legislature and the judiciary.

27. **Ms. Ameline** said that, on the issue of freedom of expression, her question had arisen out of an alarming report by United Nations experts clearly showing that the rights of journalists working in the occupied territories had been violated. Referring to the Committee's general recommendation No. 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations, she said that, in her view, the dire living conditions of some women in Gaza engaged the responsibility of the State of Israel. She would welcome the delegation's comments, particularly in view of a recent United Nations report stating that the economy of Gaza was probably no longer viable. On the question of asylum, she asked how many of the nearly 50,000 persons from Darfur, Eritrea and the Sudan, who were currently living in very poor conditions, in Israel had been granted refugee status.

28. **Ms. Hayashi** said that the Committee had previously recommended that the State party should adopt legislation defining and prohibiting direct and indirect discrimination against women. She would appreciate hearing how the State party was developing the principle of gender equality in accordance with articles 1 and 2 of the Convention.

29. **Ms. Schulz** said that, in three of the cases cited in annex 3 of the State party's report, the courts had invoked and applied both article 16 of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendation No. 21 on equality in marriage and family relations, which interpreted article 16. The judiciary was apparently applying an article to which the State party maintained reservations. Noting that the question of *gett* — divorce documents in Jewish religious law — was not only a matter of religious jurisdiction but was also covered by State administrative, civil and criminal legislation, she suggested that the State party should take a broad approach to its review of those reservations, and she asked whether it was ready to lift its reservations on article 16 (1) (a), (b), (d), (e), (f) and (h). It should not be difficult to lift the reservation on article 16 (2) given the recent change in the law raising the minimum marriage age to 18.

30. **Ms. Raz Shechter** (Israel) said that Israel had very little room to act in Gaza. It did not occupy Gaza, having withdrawn from that territory unilaterally. The terrorist organization Hamas was in complete control of all that happened there. Nevertheless, Israel was doing as much as it could to alleviate the economic situation. Hundreds of trucks brought products into the territory every day through the border crossing from Israel. In addition, Israel ran programmes for the empowerment of women in Gaza.

31. **Ms. Tene-Gilad** (Israel) said that, notwithstanding the absence of a Constitution, Israel took the principles of non-discrimination and equality between women and men extremely seriously. The large body of law on such matters and the rulings of the Supreme Court attested to the fact that non-discrimination and equality were principles rooted in the fabric of Israeli law.

32. **Ms. Cohen-Bakshi** (Israel) said that the Supreme Court's rulings tended to confirm the basic right to equality. In a recent case, it had emphasized that an attempt to reimpose the status of *aguna*, a term for a Jewish woman whose husband refused or was unable to give her a divorce, was a violation of the woman's basic right to human dignity under the Basic Law on Human Dignity and Liberty, and a denial of her liberty, which the Court had deemed unconstitutional.

33. **Ms. Hayashi** said that the Committee had previously recommended that the State party should adopt a comprehensive national plan for the advancement of women, yet the report referred only to an action plan on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). She would appreciate some information on plans to adopt a comprehensive national action plan covering significant areas of the Convention and providing benchmarks and a time frame for achievement of its medium and long-term goals. In that regard, she asked whether the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women was responsible for collecting the gender-disaggregated data that should form the basis of a national policy. Noting that the Authority had a rather broad mandate, she said that she would like to know more about its mandate to monitor the implementation of policy and legislation.

34. The delegation's opening statement had referred to the introduction of gender analyses of ministerial budgets, and she wondered what the consequences might be if such an analysis revealed shortcomings in a ministry's approach. Would the Authority be entitled to modify the budget, for example?

35. Referring to the Committee's general recommendation No. 33 on women's access to justice, she pointed out that the Committee considered it important for a State party to establish a single national human rights institution in conformity with the Paris Principles, in order to provide women with adequate access to justice and, notably, a complaints procedure. Th victims of discrimination required access to affordable justice from bodies that understood ntersectional discrimination — of particular importance in a multiracial and multicultural society such as Israel.

36. **Ms. Rana** said that, despite the success of the Team of Directors referred to in the report (para. 113) in increasing the representation of women on boards of State-owned companies, Israeli Arab women still accounted for only 0.5 per cent of applicants to the Team. She welcomed the programme put in place by the Government to increase awareness and encourage more diversity in the Team, but she would like to know more about the goals of the programme and the timeline for achieving them.

37. Referring to attempts by a rabbi during the latest elections to the Knesset to deter Orthodox women from standing in the elections, she asked what special measures and penalties were in place to address religious coercion of that kind and prevent its recurrence, including political parties that applied such ideologies. Although explicit legislation mandating adequate representation of women existed in the State party, it did not appear to be enforced, particularly in religious contexts such as the appointment of rabbis and appointments to rabbinical courts. Given that the lack of political representation of ultra-Orthodox women had a negative impact on the enjoyment of other rights, she would like to know whether the State party was considering temporary special measures in order to enforce the relevant legislation.

38. The State party had reported that women accounted for 26 per cent of the police force. Were those women spread throughout the ranks and, if not, were there any measures to encourage women's inclusion at higher ranks? Noting that over half of the 725 judges in Israel were women, she said that only 9 of those women were Muslim. She wondered why the numbers were so low, whether any of those women identified themselves as Palestinian and what special measures were in place to increase the representation of Muslims in the Israeli judiciary.

39. Alternate sources reported discrimination against Haredi women on public transport and in education; they were even banned from certain streets. She enquired what special measures were in place to end direct discrimination against Haredi women and, conversely, to promote women's participation and prominence in the public arena.

40. Palestinian women leaving the West Bank to work in Jerusalem were reportedly being stopped and, along with their children, searched at checkpoints, a process that could take up to two hours of their travel time. Some were being assaulted during searches. She would like to know what the State party was doing to address that situation.

41. **Ms. Palmor** (Israel) said that Israel was very concerned about the participation of Muslim citizens in the judicial system. A fair proportion of male judges were Muslim and it was not clear why there were so few Muslim women judges.

42. There was as yet no comprehensive plan of action on the advancement of women, not least because it had taken a long time for the minister responsible for the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women to find the right person to head that body. The new head had just taken office.

43. Ministries were required to report to the Government on their budgets each year. All ministries were eager to show that their budgets were truly gender-sensitive, but there were no formal consequences if that was not the case. The single human rights institution was a frequent topic of discussion. The issue was not whether or not to create such an institution but how to set about it in a context where no ministry wished to relinquish its own brief for particular human rights questions. Only two of the plethora of political parties in Israel had no women members. The exclusion of women had been condemned by the Attorney General.

44. **Ms. Kabaha** (Israel) said that the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women had launched a programme to facilitate the integration of unemployed Arab women into the labour market by providing them with careers advice and other forms of support. The Authority was also working to encourage more Arab schoolgirls to pursue technological studies. The Equal Employment Opportunities Commission had itself undertaken an awareness-raising campaign to encourage more Arab women to avail themselves of its services. An index to measure the level of diversity and to track wages in 20 major companies in the Israeli labour market had been launched in December 2016. The Government Companies Authority had, with the assistance of the Commission, issued guidance to all the companies coming under its authority emphasizing the importance of having a diverse workforce and the need to include members of the Arab population. The Commission had also launched a three-year plan aimed at enhancing the diversity of key government companies. Under the plan, at least 10 per cent of the employees of such companies had to belong to the Arab community. The Commission was also working with government companies to increase the number of Arab women occupying director positions.

45. **Ms. Palmor** (Israel) said that there were 219 female judges currently serving in the country's magistrate courts, the vast majority of whom were Jewish. While the fact of belonging to the Jewish or Arab community was taken into account when appointing judges, the fact of being Muslim or Christian was not. The percentage of Arab women studying law, or potential female judges, and not the percentage of Arab women making up the country's population, should be used as the benchmark for comparing the percentage of female Arab judges to that of female Jewish, Muslim or Christian judges.

46. The five-year programme aimed at integrating the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community into the higher education system through the setting of targets, run by the Council for Higher Education, was due to end in 2017. However, ultra-Orthodox Jews attended separate higher education institutions adapted to their specific cultural and academic needs. Around 70 per cent of the programme's beneficiaries were women. Since the programme's inception, some 1,800 women had received a scholarship under the programme.

47. The integration of traditional groups, such as the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community, into the labour market and the education system continued to pose a significant challenge to the Government and was the source of much discussion in Israeli society. The Government was constantly searching for innovative ways and means to integrate that community into

the system and ensure that future generations of ultra-Orthodox Jews would be able to attend mainstream higher education institutions.

48. **Ms. Ameline** said that the Sustainable Development Goals could provide a useful framework for new policy measures to promote and protect women's rights at the local and national level. The State party also had a duty to ensure that its equality and diversity policies catered to the specific needs of minority groups.

49. **Ms. Rana** said that she would appreciate it if the delegation could comment on reports that Palestinian women were often assaulted at Israeli checkpoints. Noting that binding targets for the appointment of women had been introduced in a number of government departments and that failure to meet those targets could result in a reduction in budget allocations, she asked whether that policy was enforced in practice and, if so, which government departments had suffered budget cuts. Recalling that women's participation in peace negotiations tended to be extremely low, she asked what measures the State party had taken to remedy that situation and to give effect to the Committee's general recommendation No. 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations.

50. **Ms. Schulz** said that, according to alternative sources, the adoption of new guidelines on legal aid by the Ministry of Justice in April 2016 had led to a decrease in the number of applications for such assistance. Under the new guidelines, women's access to legal aid was subject to strict conditions. She asked whether the State party intended to alter the current system to avoid penalizing children and their mothers, who were most likely to fall into poverty. Female refugees and asylum-seeking women faced a similar problem but, as they were not registered as residents of Israel, they could not even apply for legal aid. She asked whether the State party might consider granting them legal aid without excessive bureaucracy, taking into account the obstacles that they faced, such as language barriers and a lack of documentation.

51. **Mr. Bahat** (Israel) said that a growing number of women were occupying high-ranking positions within the Israeli National Police. By way of example, the chief of the human resources branch was a woman. Furthermore, women served as brigadier generals and police commanders throughout Israel.

52. **Ms. Fefer Finarsky** (Israel) said that limitations on movement were only imposed when there were security considerations warranting them. There were checkpoints between the West Bank and Israel where a significant number of Palestinians with entry permits passed each day. Despite a number of those checkpoints being located in sensitive areas, passing through them was subject to only minimal security screening, which was only usually initiated when there were specific grounds for suspicion. In an effort to minimize the impact of security checks on the rights and religious sensibilities of women in the West Bank, the rules and regulations governing the Israeli Defence Forces required soldiers to deal with women in a manner that was respectful of their personal dignity and customs. Unless required for operational reasons, actual physical contact between a male soldier and a woman was avoided. Only a female soldier or police woman was authorized to perform a body search of a woman, who could not be asked to undress unless security considerations required it. Members of the Israeli Defence Forces received training on gender sensitivity and, since the beginning of 2017, 30 gender sensitivity courses and training sessions had taken place. All allegations of mistreatment were investigated and violations of the relevant rules and regulations were duly punished.

53. **Ms. Cohen-Bakshi** (Israel) said that, in Israel, legal aid was granted on the basis of a means test and the likelihood of the applicant's claim being upheld. In family proceedings, only the means of the applicant and not those of the family unit were tested, unlike in civil proceedings. Consequently, most single mothers were eligible for legal aid in family proceedings. While legal aid could be granted to a custodial parent on the basis of financial need, such aid was not available to a non-custodial parent. Given that the custodial parent was, more often than not, the mother, women tended to be granted legal aid more often than men. The recent change in policy had been the result of an appeal lodged with the High Court of Justice claiming that the previous policy was discriminatory in that women were provided with free legal aid in custody and maintenance cases, regardless of their financial

situation, whereas men had to undergo a means test. Under the current policy, the means of both parents were to be tested. However, the Director of the Legal Aid Administration could decide to waive that requirement if it was likely to cause harm to the child. In certain circumstances, a child could apply for legal aid independently. The implications of the current legal aid policy were reviewed periodically.

54. **Ms. Palmor** (Israel) said that the Ministry of Justice was exploring the possibility of increasing the budget of the Public Defender's Office in order to extend legal aid in Rahat and in the south of country.

55. **Ms. Dror-Shpoliansky** (Israel) said that, according to research conducted by the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women, women's underrepresentation in local government was primarily attributable to a lack of awareness of the possibility of standing for election. The Authority had recommended that local authorities should enhance the transparency of their gender budgeting and adopt temporary special measures to help them achieve gender parity in high-level positions.

56. **Ms. Kabaha** (Israel) said that, as the civil service was the country's largest employer, the Government had taken several measures to encourage more Arab women to join its ranks, including providing them with a rental subsidy and reimbursing their travel expenses if they relocated to take up a new post, improving their access to vacancy announcements and increasing their representation in civil service examiners' committees. Regrettably, Arab women accounted for only 4 per cent of all civil servants. The Equal Employment Opportunities Commission was working with the civil service to remedy that imbalance. The Commission had also encouraged the different government ministries to step up their efforts to enhance the diversity of their respective workforces.

57. **Ms. Tene-Gilad** (Israel) said that the Government understood the need to take the Sustainable Development Goals into account when drafting new plans and policies for the promotion and protection of women's rights. A challenge to the newly adopted guidelines on legal aid had been filed with the Supreme Court and several amendments had been proposed. As the challenge and proposed amendments were still under consideration, the status quo remained.

58. **Ms. Raz Shechter** (Israel) said that, since the establishment of Israel, the Government had expressed its desire for a resolution to the conflict to be found. It encouraged the Palestinian National Authority to strengthen its institutions, to do more to educate Palestinian women about conflict resolution and to involve more Palestinian women in the peace process. The Government would continue to provide opportunities for Israeli and Palestinian women to exchange views and to promote peace.

59. **Ms. Ameline** said that, despite the State party's efforts to combat gender stereotypes in Israeli society, the different religious laws governing personal status continued to reinforce them by promoting the stigmatization of women awaiting a divorce or whose children had been born out of wedlock. Moreover, the exclusion of women from certain fields of public and political life was unacceptable, not to mention undemocratic, and warranted a more robust response from the State party.

60. While the State party was to be commended on its efforts to break down the deep-seated taboo surrounding domestic violence in Israeli society, it needed to provide judges, particularly religious judges, with additional training on that subject. Minority women were often victims of multiple forms of discrimination and were exposed to forms of violence to which other women were not. She urged the State party to consider ratifying the Istanbul Convention and to adopt a comprehensive law against gender-based violence and domestic violence.

61. **Ms. Gabr** said that there was consensus among the United Nations human rights monitoring mechanisms that Israel was responsible for ensuring respect for international human rights standards in the occupied Palestinian territories. She asked how the State party intended to reconcile its international human rights obligations towards women with security considerations, particularly at checkpoints. She also wished to know whether allegations of the use of excessive force against and the ill-treatment of women at checkpoints by members of the Israeli Defence Forces and acts of violence committed by

Israeli settlers were routinely investigated. Furthermore, the refusal to grant Palestinians building permits, the demolition of Palestinian homes and the practice of night raids all had a disproportionate impact on women. It would be useful to know whether the State party had taken steps to promote a more positive image of Palestinian women in the media and in textbooks and the school curriculum.

62. Noting that there had been an increase in the number of Palestinian women and girls being placed in detention, she asked what measures the State party had taken to give effect to the Committee's general recommendation No. 33 on women's access to justice and whether those women and girls had access to adequate health-care services and Arabic-speaking health-care professionals. The delegation might also comment on reports that female Palestinian detainees were sometimes transferred to prisons in Israel, which was unlawful. It was regrettable that women's rights defenders were often targets of violence and that peaceful protests were increasingly subject to criminal penalties. She would like to hear more about the civil society-led initiative to amend Israeli sexual harassment laws to afford women and girls in detention greater protection. The delegation might also clarify whether security officers were once again authorized to take their weapons home and, if so, whether the State party planned to outlaw that practice.

63. **Ms. Jahan** said that she would like to hear details of the steps that had been taken to align anti-trafficking legislation and programmes with the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. She also wished to learn whether a formal mechanism was in place to monitor employment agencies in order to prevent the exploitation of female foreign nationals who had entered the State party with valid work visas. She would appreciate information on plans to increase the number of trained labour inspectors, social workers and interpreters in the agricultural and care sectors and to improve the capacity of judicial and law enforcement personnel, including police and border guards, in the identification and early referral of victims of trafficking and in gender-sensitive investigation methods.

64. She noted that, while the number of female asylum seekers in the State party had decreased, more effort was required from the authorities to address the lack of access to identification procedures and support and rehabilitation services for asylum seekers, particularly in outlying areas of the country. She would welcome information on the preventive measures contained in the anti-trafficking strategies that would reduce the specific vulnerabilities of Bedouin, Palestinian and Arab-Israeli women affected by forced evictions, displacement and punitive housing demolitions. She would appreciate details of the steps being taken to improve the management of the borders between the State party and the occupied Palestinian territories and to facilitate communication between the relevant authorities working to combat trafficking and sexual exploitation. It was unclear whether the National Anti-Trafficking Unit and the Knesset Subcommittee on Combating Trafficking in Women and Prostitution were mandated to address the issues facing women who were subjected to forced evictions and housing demolitions.

65. Given that victims of trafficking were only provided with rehabilitation services for a period of one year, she wished to know what measures were being taken to protect those women from falling prey to further abuse once that entitlement ended. She would be grateful for clarification of whether victims of trafficking received free legal assistance. It would be helpful to have further information on the safeguards in place to protect trafficking victims who chose not to live in shelters from arrest for immigration violations.

66. She would appreciate updated data, disaggregated by age, ethnicity, nationality and region, on the prevalence of prostitution in the State party. It would be useful to have an account of the measures in place to eliminate the online sexual exploitation of women and girls. She would welcome details of the status of draft legislation aimed at criminalizing the use of prostitution services, including the expected time frame for their adoption, the measures envisaged to prevent prostitution being driven underground and the provisions that would be made for the rehabilitation of women who wished to leave prostitution.

67. **Ms. Palmor** (Israel) said that no negative stereotypes of Palestinian women existed in Israel. On the contrary, Israeli citizens found it shocking when they heard Palestinian

women praise their sons for carrying out terrorist attacks because they viewed all mothers positively.

68. There were approximately 10,000 people involved in prostitution in Israel, around 10 per cent of whom were minors. The Government was keen to learn from the experiences of other countries, including Sweden, that had criminalized the buying of prostitution services. The relevant draft legislation was still being finalized and decisions had not yet been taken on the criminal or administrative penalties that would be imposed under the law.

69. A new unit had been set up to coordinate the fight against trafficking. Guidance was provided to the police, the prison service and other actors such as hotel owners regarding the reporting of trafficking activities and the identification of victims. The authorities provided victims with free legal assistance. A project involving the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services and the Ministry of Justice was being set up to rehabilitate persons who had been victims of kidnapping, ransom and torture in the Sinai desert.

70. **Ms. Cohen-Bakshi** (Israel) said that religious judges received training on domestic violence and cooperated with social workers in efforts to remove the stigma attached to it. The film *Gett: The Trial of Viviane Ansalem*, a drama depicting the struggles faced by a woman whose husband had refused to consent to a divorce, had been screened at an annual gathering of rabbinical judges in 2015.

71. **Ms. Dror-Shpoliansky** (Israel) said that the transfer of Palestinian detainees to prisons inside Israel had been the subject of judicial review by the High Court of Justice on a number of occasions. The Court had found the practice to be lawful and had highlighted the improved conditions of detention following the replacement of the Israel Defense Forces with the Israel Prison Service as the supervising body. It had also noted that the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War was being applied to realities that had not been foreseen by its authors. The area's geographical proximity to Israel meant that the rights to visits and to assistance by counsel were not denied to Palestinian women held in detention there.

72. Amendments had been made to legislation in 2016 in order to enable the Minister of Public Security to permit private security guards to carry firearms outside their place and hours of work for reasons of public security and safety. Safeguards were in place, including specific time limits and the refusal of permission for individuals with a criminal record of violence.

73. **Ms. Lerer Shaib** (Israel) said that all schools in Israel provided instruction on respect between boys and girls and the prevention of gender-based violence and stereotypes. Special learning programmes were in place to encourage relationships based on honour and equality.

74. **Ms. Fefer Finarsky** (Israel) said that planning and zoning legislation was enforced in the West Bank in accordance with the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and was applied without discrimination between Israeli and Palestinian constructions in order to ensure the proper allocation of public resources and prevent unauthorized control of land. Rigorous safeguards were in place during the enforcement process and decisions were subject to judicial review by the High Court of Justice. The Government took the position that it would not enforce demolition orders affecting Bedouin populations, who were semi-nomadic and mostly resided illegally on land that did not belong to them, if it was not able to offer them alternative housing.

75. **Ms. Ben-Zvi** (Israel) said that all inmates entering a facility run by the Israel Prison Service were examined by a physician within 24 hours of their arrival and upon request during their incarceration. Decisions on medical treatment were taken by medical personnel only. The Prison Service had no control over the dates on which medical appointments were made for prisoners requiring care outside prison facilities, which were arranged by the relevant hospitals or clinics. Prison Service personnel facilitated communication with hospital staff for inmates who spoke Arabic.

76. **Mr. Bahat** (Israel) said that police officers were taught to respect all protesters in demonstrations. If the police received advance notification that a demonstration involving

women was planned, it ensured that female officers were assigned to it. In 2017, a new unit had been set up to fight online sex offences. In addition to responding to complaints of such offences, the unit actively searched for paedophiles operating on the Internet.

77. **Ms. Tene-Gilad** (Israel) said that her Government was continuing to consider the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. Amendments had been made in 2014 to the legislation on obscene publications to encompass online access to and the streaming of pornographic material. The Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Education had run a programme over three years to teach schoolchildren about the dangers of Internet pornography.

78. **Ms. Gabr** said that she would welcome the delegation's comments on how the Government planned to implement the Committee's general recommendations No. 33 on women's access to justice and No. 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19. It was unclear whether the authorities only demolished homes for which construction permits had not been issued. She would welcome additional details of peace education initiatives.

79. **Ms. Ameline** said that addressing security concerns did not have to preclude guaranteeing women's rights. Better protection for women would have a positive impact on security in the region. She would welcome confirmation that women's shelters in the State party had adequate financial resources. It would be interesting to hear whether the Government intended to make shelters permanent and fully operational throughout the country.

80. **Ms. Jahan** said that she wished to learn about any steps the Government was taking to ensure that persons convicted of trafficking received sentences commensurate with the gravity of the offence and to tackle official complicity in that area. She would welcome data on the investigations launched and prosecutions brought in connection with trafficking since 2011.

81. **Ms. Palmor** (Israel) said that housing demolitions were not only carried out on Bedouin settlements; in 2017 the Jewish settlement of Amona had also been demolished. The Authority for Development and Housing of the Bedouins in the Negev was responsible for addressing the complex legal issues surrounding landownership. A previous agreement between the State and the Bedouin community that had guaranteed a piece of land for every Bedouin woman had been criticized as encouraging the practice of polygamy. Information on the provision of services for victims of trafficking beyond the initial 12-month entitlement period would be provided in writing.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.

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Summary record of the 1543rd meeting
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 31 October 2017, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Leinarte

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Sixth periodic report of Israel (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention (*continued*)

Sixth periodic report of Israel (*continued*) (CEDAW/C/ISR/6; CEDAW/C/ISR/QPR/6)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Israel took places at the Committee table.*

Articles 1 to 6 (continued)

2. **Ms. Kabaha** (Israel) said that the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs had recently significantly increased the monthly rate allocated for the care of women and children at shelters for battered women, raising it from about $4,000 to over $5,100 per month.

3. **Ms. Arbel-Alon** (Israel) said that the Ministry of Health provided multiple services for persons who entered the country illegally over the border from Egypt. The paediatric services thus provided for free by the Ministry were comparable to those made available to Israelis, including prenatal and postnatal care and routine inoculations. As at January 2017, over 3,200 families who had entered the country illegally across the border with Egypt, including over 4,000 children, were receiving free care at the mother and child health-care station in Tel Aviv-Yafo. A specific clinic was available for undocumented migrants, which, in 2016 alone, had provided treatment to over 36,000 persons. A range of medical services and tests were provided at the facility, which were no longer limited to emergency care but extended to treatment for chronic illnesses such as hypertension and diabetes. A call for bids would soon be issued to expand the services to other cities. In 2016, 791 infants had been born to foreigners in Israeli hospitals. The cost of the hospital stay for delivery was fully covered by the Ministry of Health. Secondary medical care for prisoners was provided by health-care centres throughout the country, mainly through hospital outpatient clinics.

Articles 7 to 9

4. **Ms. Rana** said that she wished to commend the State party on the progress made in increasing the number of women, including Arab women, in the Knesset. However, according to many observers, the placement of women candidates in low positions on party lists for local elections practically ensured that they would never be elected. She wondered whether the State party had any programmes in place to encourage women's participation in the political process or to increase the number of Arab women members of the Knesset and whether non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were involved in such initiatives. Were any steps taken to advocate for gender parity in political parties, including ultra-Orthodox parties whose by-laws currently prohibited women from running for office, or to establish quotas for gender parity and minority representation in the Knesset?

5. She asked whether such by-laws were legal, on what legal basis such parties could exclude women from political participation and whether the Government was considering the adoption of measures against the parties that thus excluded women's participation, for instance by means of a reduction of public financial support. The Committee would welcome information on the Government's plans to adopt quantitative targets, with timelines, for increased political participation by women in all political parties and local administrations. While welcoming the appointment of a woman as President of the Supreme Court, she noted that just four of the Court's judges were women, that women were not allowed to appear or serve as judges in rabbinical courts and that only a small percentage of diplomatic posts were filled by Arab women, who were generally assigned to secondary diplomatic missions. Notwithstanding the fact that there was gender parity in diplomatic training courses, parity was not ensured in the ranks of the foreign service. The Committee would also like to know how many ultra-Orthodox women were employed in the diplomatic corps. The State party might inform the Committee of the measures it

planned to implement to ensure that all political parties in Israel respected the principles outlined in articles 7 and 8 of the Convention.

6. **Ms. Schulz** said that the Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law had limitations and completely prevented family reunification, affecting the lives of over 20,000 persons since its adoption in 2003. Under the Law, the granting and withdrawal of permits for entry into Israel were entirely within the power of the State, apparently with no application of transparent criteria, which created great uncertainty among the persons concerned. Although the Law had been amended over the years, it still prohibited Palestinians from the occupied territories from obtaining citizenship or permanent resident status in Israel through marriage with Israeli citizens or residents of East Jerusalem, although such opportunities existed for other non-Jewish spouses of Israelis. If a foreign spouse was Jewish, Israeli citizenship was acquired automatically. The law thus created unequal treatment and discriminated between people based on their citizenship or ethnic origin or that of their spouses. It also created differences in legal status within couples and families, resulting in unequal status among the members of families, whereby some were left with no legal status while other family members had full rights.

7. Women were particularly exposed to the risks arising from the Law. Couples affected by its provisions had particularly high rates of poverty owing to restrictions on persons lacking official status in respect of education and employment, for instance. Couples affected by the law faced the difficult choice of living in Israel, thus leaving one spouse undocumented, or living in the West Bank, in which case spouses with citizenship or residence rights in Israel could lose those rights.

8. Did the State party plan to relax the total ban on the entry of persons from Gaza and, if so, when? As the law seriously affected the rights of the persons involved, were there any initiatives to replace the current system with one that respected the principles of equality and proportionality? Had the State party considered adopting targeted security measures applied on a case-by-case basis so as to examine all requests for residency permits, and had it considered removing the time constraints of the present system?

9. **Ms. Palmor** (Israel) said that women had been able to present cases at the rabbinical courts for many years. The courts were in the process of recruiting legal assistants, and such recruitment had recently been opened to women applicants. The motivation for Arab women to be represented in the judiciary, the Knesset and political parties varied. The underrepresentation of Arabs in the Ministry of Justice, for instance, probably resulted at least in part from the fact that not everyone wanted to work for the State. Many Arab women felt that it was preferable to work as public defenders instead.

10. The Government would like to see more political participation by Arab women. How to encourage Arab women to take part in political life in municipalities that were 100 per cent Arab was an open question. As for participation by Arab women in political parties, there was a lack of interest on their part in most political parties, and the coalition of Arab parties, for its part, had 13 members of the Knesset, of whom 2 were women. The State did not intervene in party politics. In some parties, the party leader personally named members to electoral lists, with no democratic process. Such parties actually tended to have more representation of women, as they were particularly aware of the need to appeal to women voters. As for the ultra-Orthodox parties, the Attorney General did not approve of their exclusion of women from electoral lists and had shared his concern with the Central Elections Committee, but no sanctions were under consideration.

11. **Ms. Tene-Gilad** (Israel) said that the Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law had been adopted following a string of horrendous terrorist attacks, some of which had been perpetrated by persons who had obtained citizenship through family reunification. The Law had been passed as a temporary measure and had been amended and extended several times. It was currently valid until the end of June 2018. The Government was fully aware of its effect on the lives of Palestinian men and women, but it considered that the Law was necessary in the light of the security situation in the country. It had been adjusted over the years, for example by extending the validity of permits from one year to two and by easing certain restrictions, for humanitarian purposes. In 2016 and 2017, hundreds of people with

temporary permits for stays in Israel had thus been granted national health insurance under the law.

12. **Ms. Raz Shechter** (Israel) said that the ultra-Orthodox community was particularly large in Jerusalem and that women from the community were integrated into the workforce of government offices, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Arab women were included in the Ministry's cadet courses for recruitment to diplomatic posts and a number of young diplomats were already serving in various missions.

13. **Ms. Kremer** (Israel) said that training courses for careers in the foreign service were open to all women and confirmed that ultra-Orthodox women were indeed represented in diplomatic missions.

14. **Ms. Schulz** said that it was her understanding that ultra-Orthodox women were able to vote but were not allowed to run for election owing to the fact that the statutes of the ultra-Orthodox parties prevented them from doing so. How could that situation be reconciled with the country's basic laws, including the Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty, which clearly prohibited such discrimination? The State had failed to take all practical measures to ensure the right of all women citizens to be candidates, in accordance with article 7 of the Convention, a situation that had not been addressed in the reservation expressed by Israel in respect of the article.

15. **Ms. Palmor** (Israel) said that there were many political parties in Israel that were not Orthodox, including some whose candidate lists were decided solely by their leaders. It would be possible and indeed practical for such parties to name women from ultra-Orthodox communities, some of whom were prominent in society, on their electoral lists, but the question would remain as to whether they would choose to join. The Government agreed with the concerns expressed by the Committee. However, it would be wrong to consider that ultra-Orthodox women had no avenues for representation.

16. **Ms. Tene-Gilad** (Israel) said that the Attorney General had been asked to express his opinion on the matter and that he had decided not to intervene, in deference to the right of political parties to decide upon their own candidate lists.

17. **Ms. Rana** asked whether a woman could be appointed to the rabbinical courts as a judge.

18. **Ms. Schulz** asked whether the State party had considered instituting a requirement for the alternation of male and female candidates on electoral lists. If such a step was unrealistic in the current political climate, then the Government should take action to ensure that the statutes of political parties would be consistent with the Basic Law: Human Dignity and Freedom.

19. **Ms. Palmor** (Israel) said that it was not possible for women to be appointed as judges in the rabbinical courts and that the State party had entered a reservation on that point. The issue had been regularly raised in Israel, most recently after the appointment of a woman as a qadi in the Muslim religious courts. In that case, however, there had been precedents in other countries. To the best of her knowledge, no woman had ever been appointed as a judge in a rabbinical court in any country.

Articles 10 to 14

20. **Ms. Bethel** said that she was concerned about marginalization of women and girls in the Arab, Bedouin and Christian communities in Israel and in the occupied territories and about unequal access to quality education and inequality in the budgeting and resourcing of the schools for such communities. According to some reports, ultra-Orthodox women and girls too were subjected to discrimination and segregation, for example in higher education. The State party had offered little information on access to education for women and girls from families that had come to Israel from Ethiopia.

21. Had the Government carried out any studies of the impact of efforts to improve the level of scholastic achievement in the Bedouin community? The delegation might inform the Committee what percentage of the budget was allocated to educating Bedouin children. The Committee would also like to know whether the State party ensured age-appropriate

sexual and reproductive health education for women and girls of disadvantaged groups, including those in the ultra-Orthodox community. What was the prevalence of teenage pregnancy, and how were girls reintegrated into the education system after they gave birth? The delegation should inform the Committee of the impact of specific gender programmes conducted by the Ministry of Education for the Arab, Bedouin and Druze communities and of plans for future activities along the same lines. The Committee had received reports that, in the Arab school system and textbooks, efforts had lagged in eliminating gender stereotypes. What measures were being taken to eliminate such stereotypes in the curriculum of Arab schools? Had any measures been taken to encourage Arab women and girls to choose non-traditional fields of higher education, such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics or technical fields of vocational training?

22. Under the Convention, Israel had an extraterritorial obligation to respect and protect the right to education of Palestinian women and girls in the occupied territories. What measures were being taken to stop restrictions by Israeli security forces at checkpoints, which adversely affected access to education in the occupied territories? When would the ban on permitting students from Gaza to have access to educational facilities in the West Bank be lifted?

23. **Mr. Bergby** said that, notwithstanding the legal prohibition of discrimination in employment, significant wage disparities persisted in Israel and were reportedly worse in some sectors, such as information technology, than in others. The wage gap had remained at about 33 per cent over the past three decades, and efforts to reduce it through legislation and other measures had not been very effective. Did the State party envisage further incentives to encourage employers to adopt more transparent remuneration policies? He would appreciate data disaggregated by industry and by community to allow the Committee to better understand the situation of wage disparities and discrimination in Israeli society.

24. He asked whether any incentives would be introduced to encourage employers to hire women in fields that had so far been dominated by men. Certain training initiatives, for example one in Nazareth, had met with notable success in overcoming gender stereotypes and supporting women entrepreneurs. He wondered whether the Government planned to expand such programmes nationally.

25. The State party had recently passed a law establishing the obligation for employers to designate a sexual harassment officer, who should if possible be a woman. In his view, that provision might have the perverse effect of undermining the responsibility shared by men for combating sexual harassment. A law had recently been passed to mitigate the negative effects on women in the military of the integration of ultra-Orthodox men in the Israel Defence Forces. The Committee would be interested to find out how that situation and others similar to it had evolved.

26. Noting that the Government had created financial incentives specifically for the employment of ultra-Orthodox and Bedouin women, he asked whether such measures were accompanied with quotas. It had also set up eight employment centres specifically for Bedouins. The Committee would like to find out how the effectiveness of such measures was monitored and what outcomes had been achieved for women. Some 10 per cent of the Israeli population were Palestinian women, a group that had a high unemployment rate and often lived in remote villages lacking infrastructure and services, including running water, electricity, public transport and childcare, and where freedom of movement was restricted. How did the State party address their needs in terms of employment?

27. **Ms. Hofmeister** said that, although Israel enjoyed an exceptionally high standard of health care and medical resources, inequalities of access to health care continued to exist in certain places such as the occupied Palestinian territories. Infant and maternal mortality rates and life expectancies varied for Jewish women and members of other communities. Furthermore, pregnant Palestinian women were subject to particular suffering brought about by restrictions on their movement in those territories.

28. All women of childbearing age suffered from legal restrictions on the availability of abortion, the lack of information on sexual and reproductive rights, the lack of access to contraception, increasing rates of cancer and diabetes mellitus and the pressure exerted by male-dominated religious groups enforcing patriarchal traditions. She asked what steps the

State party was taking to raise awareness of sexual and reproductive rights and family planning among Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox communities and what additional steps would be taken to encourage religious Jewish husbands to share responsibility for childcare and household chores in order to protect their wives' health.

29. The Committee would welcome information on any measures taken to protect the human rights of Palestinian women, to establish special health-care programmes for lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons and to assess the impact of drug abuse and smoking on breast cancer and lung cancer.

30. She asked what steps were being taken to protect the mental health of female Holocaust survivors who had suffered sexual abuse in concentration camps and were now forced to confront a rise in support for right-wing parties all over Europe and new outbreaks of anti-Semitism. Lastly, she asked what programmes had been established to support women living with HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases.

31. **Ms. Lerer Shaib** (Israel) said that all school textbooks were examined to ensure that they incorporated a gender perspective before they were approved by the Ministry of Education. In addition, all school materials, including textbooks in Arabic, were developed in conjunction with the Department of Gender Equality.

32. Although school dropout rates for Arab girls exceeded the rates recorded for their Jewish counterparts, dropout rates for Arab girls were still relatively low and were lower than the rates for Arab boys. According to data published in 2015, 89.11 per cent of Jewish girls and 95.52 per cent of Arab girls took the final examination at the end of secondary education, known as matriculation examinations. Some 50 per cent of girls in Arab communities were eligible to enter university.

33. In line with a decision taken by the Government, the number of schools in which Jewish girls of Ethiopian descent were the majority had been reduced to 17 out of a total of 1,850. Pupils of Ethiopian descent received a voucher for extracurricular activities. The criteria applicable to programmes for gifted children had been changed to eliminate cultural bias.

34. **Ms. Arbel-Alon** (Israel) said that, since the late 1990s, cancer had been the main cause of death in Israel, accounting for 25.9 per cent of deaths among Jewish women but only 20 per cent among Arab women. Changes in demographics and economic and social indicators had a direct health impact on the health and morbidity of the populations concerned, leading, in the case of the Arab population, to an increase in longevity, a decline in infant mortality, and an increase in the presence of risk factors associated with obesity, diabetes and cancer.

35. Cases of cancer were more common among older persons. Although the Arab population was younger than the Jewish one, and had lower incidence rates for most types of cancer, the incidence of certain cancers, such as pancreatic cancer, had been rising faster among Arabs than among Jews. Disparities in the incidence of other types of cancer had been narrowing. The cancer incidence rate for both Arab and Jewish women had declined between 2006 and 2010 but had since stagnated. Morbidity rates were higher among women aged 50 and over. For almost all age groups, Arab women were less likely to contract cancer than Jewish women. Mortality rates for breast cancer had been declining in recent decades among women in both population groups. In accordance with the national breast cancer screening programme, women aged between 50 and 74 were given mammograms every two years. The mammogram take-up rate had been rising steadily for both population groups and had reached 80 per cent for both groups in 2013. Recently, a decision had been taken that made it mandatory for data on cancer treatment to be submitted to the Ministry of Health.

36. Israel was one of the few countries in the world that, in certain cases, permitted women to terminate pregnancies after the twenty-fourth week of pregnancy. Minors were also permitted to consult the board responsible for approving the performance of abortions, known as termination of pregnancy committees, without their parents' consent and knowledge. Legislation on abortion clearly set out the conditions in which pregnancies could be terminated and the procedures to be followed by the committees.

37. Health maintenance organizations had established a number of programmes to provide care to ultra-Orthodox women, including programmes that provided screening for postnatal depression, breast cancer and other preventable diseases.

38. **Ms. Palmor** (Israel) said that Holocaust survivors were given medical and mental health care through NGOs and the National Insurance Institute.

39. **Ms. Kabaha** (Israel) said that the gender pay gap between men and women stood at around 30 per cent. The Equal Employment Opportunities Commission had developed a wage gap calculator which was posted on its website that companies could use to measure wage gaps. Data gathered by the Government indicated that the gender wage gap was higher than 30 per cent in some industries and lower than 30 per cent in others. Such data enabled the Government to take steps to raise employers' awareness of the importance of narrowing the wage gap. Diversity plans established in conjunction with employers contained recommendations on recruiting more diverse staff and appointing them to positions that would cause the wage gap to be narrowed. Legal action was taken against employers who did not pay equal wages to women.

40. **Ms. Lerer Shaib** (Israel) said that girls and boys in secondary school had the option of studying gender in social science, sociology, civic studies and history. Research projects on gender could be submitted for various subjects. All counsellors in every part of the country participated in gender training courses.

41. In accordance with government resolution No. 3708, a total of 124 million new shekels (NIS) had been allocated to programmes established with the aim of improving the educational achievement of children in the Bedouin community. The Science and Technology Training Institute, under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, operated a special course that included a full scholarship, a monthly income and paid transport fees for Bedouin pupils who met the relevant requirements. In 2014, 48 pupils, including 13 girls, had begun studying the course and a further 100 pupils had enrolled in it in 2015.

42. The Ministry of Education organized programmes on the prevention of early marriage that were aimed at the Arab, Bedouin and Druze communities. The purpose of the programmes was to develop participants' sense of awareness and empowerment and to inform them of the academic and professional opportunities available to them.

43. **Ms. Fefer Finarsky** (Israel) said that the General Staff had issued an order to ensure that Israel Defence Forces personnel of different genders and faiths could serve alongside each other in harmony. In accordance with that order, Orthodox Jewish men could ask to refrain from participating in activities that might contradict their beliefs, values or religious way of life. The integration of ultra-Orthodox men in the Israel Defence Forces had had no effect on the integration and advancement of women in the Force. If a female soldier considered that she had suffered discrimination on grounds of gender, she could submit a complaint to her commander, to the Soldiers' Complaints Commissioner or to the Chief of Staff's Adviser on Women's Issues, all of whom would be required to examine the complaint and deal with it appropriately.

44. **Ms. Ameline** said that she wished to know how the State party ensured that men and women, and persons of different faiths, had equal access to social welfare benefits, pensions and financing. In considering the question of access to pensions, the delegation should take account of women working in the informal sector, women who did not work and those who were forced to take early retirement. She asked what strategies had been established to tackle disparities in access to such entitlements and what the outcome of those strategies had been.

45. Noting that the State party had drawn up a climate plan, she asked how that plan addressed the concerns of women who were directly affected by climate-related issues, such as natural resource management, and whether women were considered not only as the beneficiaries of development plans but also as decision makers in relation to their implementation. Lastly, she asked what steps were being taken to ensure that women belonging to different communities had equal opportunities to enter new, innovative sectors such as the digital sector.

46. **Ms. Bethel** said that she would like to know if funds allocated to strengthen and empower Bedouin communities in the areas of education, infrastructure, employment and medical services were dependent on whether members of those communities agreed to be relocated to cities and have their homes demolished. She asked what consultation processes were carried out to ensure that members of the Bedouin community, especially women, could express their views on the forms of development that would be in the best interests of their community, why the State party did not recognize villages that were part of Bedouin ancestral lands, whether the budget that had been set aside could adequately address the many and varied problems affecting the Bedouin community, what social security programmes were in place for Bedouin women, whether women had access to credit and banking services in villages and whether support was provided to enable Bedouin women to learn about new technologies and information services that could benefit their communities.

47. Sources indicated that, in January 2017, the State party had renewed its campaign to demolish Bedouin homes in the Negev. The Bedouin village of Umm al-Hiran had been demolished and replaced by a Jewish town, named Hiran, in which only Jewish Israeli citizens, or permanent residents of Israel who lived in accordance with Orthodox Jewish values, could live. In the light of the fact that the Supreme Court had sanctioned the demolition on the condition that the new town of Hiran would be ethnically mixed, she asked how home demolitions such as the ones that occurred in Umm al-Hiran could be reconciled with the State party's obligations under the Convention to protect the rights of women to housing, land and a secure family life.

48. **Ms. Kabaha** (Israel) said that age discrimination was prohibited by law. Data on a number of population groups, including persons aged 45 and over, were being collected for the Diversity Index to promote equal treatment and opportunities. An information campaign was planned for November 2017 and aimed to inform employers of the risks posed by discrimination and raise employees' awareness of their rights and the services available to them from the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission.

49. Regarding education, more than 60 per cent of the students at the country's institute of technology were Arab women. Several initiatives of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Social Services were aimed at promoting professions in the science, technology and innovation industries to Arab women. Similarly, under a 2018-2020 programme, NIS 15 million had been allocated to empower Arab women to study technical subjects in higher education.

50. **Ms. Tene-Gilad** (Israel) said that responsibility for dealing with matters related to planning in the Negev now lay with the Authority for Development and Housing of the Bedouins in the Negev, which was attached to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. The Government had recently introduced a wide-ranging five-year plan for the period 2017-2021, supported by NIS 3 billion in funding, for the purposes of empowering the Bedouin in the Negev. It focused on a number of priority areas, including education, health and infrastructure. Three-quarters of the Bedouin population were living in legally planned, urban areas. The remainder lived in hundreds of small clusters in the Negev that obstructed urban expansion and hindered the State's ability to provide basic services. Several Bedouin localities now had approved plans outlining the necessary infrastructure, services and utilities, and feasibility studies had been commissioned. However, the Government was compelled to issue demolition orders for illegal structures, since they did not adhere to planning laws. In most cases, those structures were makeshift constructions, not homes. Where possible, alternative land in planned areas was offered to the Bedouin population affected.

51. **Ms. Arbel-Alon** (Israel) said that a health-care programme for the Bedouin population had been allocated NIS 19 million, which aimed to add to the number of Bedouin women employed as health mediators, increase research on genetic conditions that were unique to the Bedouin population, provide folic-acid-enriched flour to pregnant women in villages, and establish health-care centres in areas with a large Bedouin presence. Nursing degree programmes had also begun to offer places specifically for Bedouin women and men with a view to increasing their representation in that field.

Articles 15 and 16

52. **Ms. Schulz** said that she failed to understand how the State party could be at once so modern, in areas such as science, technology and innovation, and yet unable to modernize its personal status laws. She noted that inter-faith or protestant couples, who could not be married in Israel, could get divorced but only from the rabbinical courts, which accorded men a more advantageous position. She wished to know whether the Government intended to draft legislation permitting couples who were married in civil procedures abroad to seek a divorce from a family court if they so wished and whether there were plans to allow all couples in Israel the freedom to choose between civil and religious marriage and divorce.

53. Regarding the situation of women who were unable to obtain divorces from their husbands, she wondered whether the Government envisaged calling for stricter enforcement of the law on the implementation of divorce judgments by the rabbinical courts with a view to removing the procedural burden on women seeking divorce whose husbands were recalcitrant. She would like to know what measures had been taken to ensure that the retroactive cancellation of a divorce could only take place in specific exceptional circumstances.

54. There had been an increase in cases of joint physical custody of children, even when there was great conflict between the parents. Such a development had a number of negative consequences for women and children, including an increased risk of poverty, and was contrary to the State party's established tender-years doctrine, namely that children under 6 years old should stay with their mother. She would welcome an update on the work of the Schnitt Committee, which had been tasked with examining the rules on shared parental responsibility and had recommended the removal of the provision under the guardianship law known as the "tender-years presumption".

55. She wished to know what action had been taken in respect of terminating or limiting the appointment of men in the civil service who were living in polygamous relationships. Lastly, she asked what measures were taken to prevent early marriages and whether such marriages were reported to the police, investigated and prosecuted.

56. **Ms. Palmor** (Israel) said that a committee had been set up to tackle the issue of polygamy. The Attorney General's guidelines on polygamy and marriages involving minors were being updated. The sharia courts were obliged to report any cases of marriages of minors. Some 80 per cent of Bedouin families were polygamous. Nevertheless, her Government was seeking ways of discouraging younger men from entering into polygamous marriages.

57. **Ms. Cohen-Bakshi** (Israel) said that, since the establishment of the State of Israel, marriage and divorce had been regulated by religious law. Despite legislative proposals put forward, the Knesset had not passed any law that would allow for civil marriage and divorce. In 2010, however, it had adopted legislation on the registration of unions of persons professing religions not recognized in Israel, thus enabling them to formalize their relationship in a manner parallel to the institution of marriage. Moreover, cohabiting and same-sex couples had the same basic rights, including economic rights, as married couples, and all civil marriages performed abroad could be registered in Israel.

58. Shared custody and child support was subject to much public debate and controversy. While both parents had joint parental responsibility, the tender-youth presumption meant that, by law, the physical custody of children under 6 years of age was awarded to the mother unless there were specific reasons in the child's best interest for deciding otherwise. The Supreme Court had ruled that joint physical custody of a child could impact child-support payments, depending on the parents' income and living arrangements. The Court also ruled that the parents' ability to cooperate and afford the costs of running two separate households, as well as the sincerity of the father's application for joint custody, should be taken into account.

59. Under Jewish law, the retroactive annulment of a divorce was an extreme measure that was implemented rarely and only in exceptional cases. No such applications had been recorded in recent years. The amended Rabbinical Courts (Implementation of Divorce Judgments) Act required courts to monitor the enforcement of divorce judgments, including

by setting deadlines. Work was also under way to create an automated system for initiating proceedings within the time frame prescribed by law with a view to obviating the need for women to apply to the court.

60. **Ms. Schulz** said that she would be interested to hear an account of the situation of *mamzer* persons, who were born out of wedlock, usually as the result of a relationship between a married Jewish woman and a man who was not her husband, and were forbidden from marrying anyone except other persons with the status of *mamzer*.

61. **Ms. Ameline** said that efforts were being made around the world to reconcile women's rights and religious practices. In that spirit, she wondered whether the increased public dialogue in relation to polygamy might lead to further modernization of religious practices.

62. **Ms. Bethel** asked what specific policy the State party had in place to ensure that teenage mothers were able to return to school to complete their education.

63. **Ms. Palmor** (Israel) said it was important to point out that polygamy was practised by the Bedouin in the south of the country, and not among the rest of the Muslim population. It was a tribal rather than a religious practice. Israel was a society in transition and, since it was a Jewish State, discussions about the practice of polygamy among the Muslim Bedouin population were sensitive. Lastly, there was no reason why teenage mothers could not return to school to complete their education.

64. **Ms. Cohen-Bakshi** (Israel) said that there was no concept of illegitimacy in Israel. However, in both Jewish and sharia law, a child born to a married woman and a man other than her husband faced serious challenges. A change in the law was unlikely to have any effect on what was a religious and social issue. That said, there were very few persons with the status of *mamzer*, and efforts to resolve the issues surrounding divorce could eliminate the problem entirely.

65. **Ms. Palmor** (Israel) said that the dialogue had been challenging and constructive. While it had not been possible to discuss all the issues women faced in the country, it had been an opportunity to learn from the Committee and see things from a different perspective.

66. **Ms. Raz Shechter** (Israel) said that there had been a clear will to engage in a substantive and open dialogue. Israel remained committed to implementing the Convention and would examine carefully the Committee's remarks and forthcoming concluding observations.

67. **The Chair** said that she wished to thank the State party for its report, which had been submitted under the simplified reporting procedure, and invited the State party to consider approving the amendment of article 20 (1) of the Convention, on the meeting time of the Committee.

The meeting rose at 5.15 p.m.